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ABSTRACT

Designed for use as supplementary instructional material in a cultural anthropology course, this learning module introduces the idea that anthropology is composed of a number of subdisciplines and that cultural anthropology has numerous subfields which are the specialty areas for many practicing anthropologists. Beginning with a general discussion of the field of anthropology, the paper next describes, defines, and discusses theoretical and historical considerations, for the following subdisciplines within anthropology: (1) archaeology; (2) physical anthropology; (3) medical anthropology; (4) cultural anthropology; (5) ethnology; (6) mathematical anthropology; (7) economic anthropology; (8) political anthropology; (9) the ethnography of law; (10) anthropology and education; (11) linguistics; (12) folklore; (13) ethnomusicology; (14) art and anthropology; (15) anthropology and belief systems; (16) culture and personality; (17) applied anthropology; (18) urban anthropology; and (19) economic anthropology. A test for students is included. (LAL)

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Subdisciplines of Anthropology

A Modular Approach

Cultural Anthropology
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Introduction:

This module has been prepared as a guide to a specific area within Cultural Anthropology. Your task will be to read the materials, perform the tasks at the end of the module, and to cross check your answers with the information in the module upon completion of the performance activities. It will be your responsibility to keep up with the reading assignments in the textbook, and to take lecture notes,and film notes.

The module is designed to give you a basis for mastering a specific amount of information, and has been field tested with over 1000 students who have demonstrated by their performance on examinations, that the modular approach can increase the probability of student mastery. The theoretical perspective which is employed is based upon cognitive psychology, gestalt psychology, behaviorism and programmed learning.

This particular module was designed to introduce the idea, that anthropology is composed of a number of subdisciplines and that Cultural Anthropology has numerous subfields which are the speciality areas for many practicing anthropologists. The module illustrates that anthropology consists of many different fields, and that introductory courses frequently highlight the field divisions of a given discipline.

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ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS MANY FIELDS

Anthropology consists of a wide variety of academic specialties. Traditional anthropology majors are prepared in several broad areas, physical anthropology and cultural anthropology being the most common. A brief survey of the breadth of the larger field reveals that information pertaining to cultural groups and humankind which includes the biological and social worlds, plus the past as well as the present, has led to an ever increasing degree of specialization. Thus, Anthropology, like all academic disciplines, has become specialized. Introductory students must therefore acquire some degree of familiarity with these subfields in order to appreciate the span of information which is available for study. Numerous subdivisions within smaller subfields are also prevalent. The module attempts to acquaint students with Anthropology as it exists today in regards to broad categorizations.

The field of ANTHROPOLOGY is the only discipline which encompasses the study of humankind from both a biological and a social perspective. As a consequence, to cover many varied areas of research, a number of subsections within Anthropology have developed. What follows is a subjective review of these major subdisciplines. The list discussed is by no means complete, nor does this review develop detailed descriptions; it is designed to provide introductory students with a broad overview of the discipline.

ARCHAEOLOGY is perhaps the most well known subdiscipline of Anthropology. It uncovers the long-buried secrets of ancient cultures. Most archaeological research is aimed at ascertaining what life was like before written records were commonplace. The earliest recorded antecedents of what is today called archaeology can be traced to the Greeks and Romans; unfortunately, they were more interested in collecting than in recording or making inferences.

Modern archaeology began during the latter part of the 19th Century. Whereas previously most archaeological research had been conducted by interested lay persons, as scholars began to question the age of the earth, and to seek information about the types of humans which had preceded classical civilizations, archaeology and academic discipline began to attract enthusiasts who had been formally trained in academic settings.

The most famous excavations of the 19th Century involved the discovery of the remnants of classical civilizations. Many early archaeologists were lured by tangible rewards: art and precious treasure were sought as well as knowledge. Then as today, the public became fascinated with classical cultures, and museums created major exhibits to cater to the demands of the viewers. American archaeology has been concerned primarily with civilizations and cultures which did not erect huge cities or large-scale monuments. As only fragmentary remnants of prehistoric American culture groups are available, in order to develop inferences an

original approach to data collection and site location has evolved. The location of human fossil sites which provide clues to our evolutionary heritage is another area of archaeological interest. The uncovering of our past rests in the hands of archaeologists; it is they who discover and excavate; after these stages are completed, other experts are called upon to lend their opinions and interpretations.

Archaeology can be divided into three major categories: evolutionary, prehistoric and classical. For those wishing to embark upon a career in this field, practical field experience combined with a strong background in mathematics and science is mandatory. New technologies are being developed which will enable archaeologists to perceive dimensions and make correlations in entirely new ways.

PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY is the study of human and non-human primate populations from a biological perspective. The major concern of the discipline is to ascertain the manner in which the human body functions, and how this might relate to our continuing evolution. Most physical anthropologists are trained in human genetics, osteology, human anatomy, physiology, primatology, and human paleontology. As the discipline is relatively broad, and has become exceedingly concerned with analysis, physical anthropologists need a thorough knowledge of the natural sciences, as well as training in chemistry, physics and mathematics. In addition to performing research and teaching general college and university courses, physical anthropologists are also often

employed to provide specialized instruction in medical schools, as well as to perform research tasks in bio-medical engineering, and to assist in forensic pathology.

MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY is the application of anthropological concepts to the field of medicine. It ranges from gathering information about cross-cultural medical practices, to helping medical staff deal with people from diverse cultural perspetives. The field is growing and will create job alternatives for those who are trained in both medicine and anthropology.

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, which is sometimes called ethnography, records the customs, habits and life ways of population groups throughout the world. The majority of ethnographers and cultural anthropologists view all groups as equal. Their primary goal is to record the rich panorama of worldwide cultural diversity and expression. Their descriptions are used to generate social theory, and to help explain human behavior.

ETHNOLOGY is sometimes used as a synonym for social anthropology, and is closely related to sociology. The primary difference between ethnologists and sociologists is that the latter tend not to have additional training in such areas as physical anthropology, nor do they usually have an elaborate or comparative knowledge of non-Western societies. Thus, most social anthropologists have a greater cross-cultural perspective to utilize in examining the social realm. Sociologists rely more heavily upon statistical and

mathematical models than do social anthropologists. The subjects of sociological study are usually drawn from Western society: for American sociology, the American scene is the focus for analysis. In comparison, social anthropologists rely upon the study of non-Western societies, with an emphasis upon verbal non-mathematical description and analysis. Their rationale for examining non-Western societies is based on the premise that cultures which are smaller and self-contained are much easier to study. Their uniqueness is believed to serve as a mirror in which to view Western society. Interestingly, within the past twenty years, the disciplines of social anthropology and sociology have adopted much of each other's methodologies. Today, they overlap in subject matter and techniques.

MATHEMATICAL ANTHROPOLOGY emphasizes the creation of models based upon uniform mathematical relationships. This form of modeling theory is not confined to statistical inferences; it also includes spacial relationships. All subdivisions of anthropology now utilize some degree of mathematical analysis and modeling.

ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY acknowledges and examines the influential role of economic institutions in shaping the behavior patterns culture exhibit. The varied forms of economic organization and their exact means of production are regarded as key areas for analysis. American anthropologists traditionally have approached economic analysis in a conservative vein. During the 19th Century, the

prevailing social and economic theories dealt with the lineal or economic progression of cultures, ranging from simple to more complex societies. The social world was seen as being shaped by specific forces which had parallel forms in the physical and biological realm. Many scholars attempted to ascertain the relative placement of cultural groups on a ladder of evolution by creating a model based upon eonomic complexity. The Lineal Evolutionary Model was an attempt to formulate a scientific framework with which to judge the supposed value of a group. Researchers tended to bestow a positive or negative label on a culture relative to its position on a scaled ladder. The reality of placement had much to do with the degree to which the culture being studied resembled or differed from the researcher's own culture, and/or the culture which was at the top of the scale.

The major economic theories of the 20th Century owe part of their philosophical bases to the positions of the lineal evolutionists. A paradox exists: although the same basic information was used to explain CAPITALISM and MARXISM, radically different economic and evolutionary models of the world were created. Many 19th Century scholars who espoused capitalism viewed SOCIAL DARWINISM as the mechanism whereby cultures were selected and placed upon an evolutionary ladder. In their view, those most suited for success were at the top; those at the bottom of the ladder were considered primitive. Marxists view the same data from a different perspective. They agree that evolution is a force in the

social realm, and that physical laws and principles are indeed applicable. However, they perceive capitalism as only one stage on the evolutionary ladder. In the Marxist perspective, capitalism will be replaced by another more advanced form of economic organization. According to Marxian theory, economic adaptation and organization is a continual process whereby groups go through dynamic changes. The final outcome, according to most Marxists, will be a classless society.

Marxist theory is an important philosophical position within worldwide anthropology. Marxist-oriented anthropologists view the world from a CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE which places an emphasis upon power. Economic anthropology deals with the control and use of the means of production and its institutional complexes. It is not surprising that some Marxist interpretations of economic systems are now found within contemporary economic anthropology. Historically, the traditional, sometimes anti-Marxist, orientation within Western anthropology resulted in attempts to ignore Marxism, and to maintain the status quo. Marxist anthropologists seek to examine and change the basic social structure of society, and question the basic assumptions of most anthropological studies. The emergence of this viewpoint has altered the very nature of global anthropology. The traditional response of American anthropologists has been to ignore or deprecate power relationships, and to argue against the application of Marxist theory. A traditional anthropological

vantage point is that so-called "neutral influences" lead to the ultimate distribution of labor and resources within a group. Because this perspective is based upon a "value-free orientation," the moral problems of power relationships rarely are discussed or acknowledged in traditionalist analyses of the mode of economic adaptation, althought most traditionalists would agree that such adaptation is the product of a wide variety of influences.

It is relatively easy to trace the historical reasons for a Third World shift away from the more traditional Western perspective. Western anthropology grew as a child of Colonialism during the 19th Century. At that time, European and American scholars who were interested in non-Western cultures formed learned societies wherein they discoursed and studied about the diverse nature of culture. Gradually the governments of France, Germany, England and the United States realized that information of this sort could be used in a variety of ways. A close relationship between early anthropologists and their governments developed, and thus a formal, governmentally-sponsored anthropology was born. It is not surprising that some of these anthropologists overlooked the prevalent genocide, poverty and disease which were destroying the groups being studied. Most ignored the plight of indigenous populations, emphasizing instead historical reconstructions of earlier cultures. These anthropologists were not "value-free"; indeed, they were so conditioned by colonialism and its ethos that a few viewed the

decaying social structures as being somewhat helpful to fieldwork, in that the anthropologist could accomplish the desired fieldwork without having to consider the wishes of the people being studied. When these colonized countries eventually obtained political independence, many viewed anthropology and anthropologists as an integral part of the colonial apparatus which had ruled them in an exploitive fashion.

POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY, considered by some as a component of economic anthropology, emphasizes the role of political organization in securing the economic and social alternatives which groups can exercise. This sub-discipline focuses upon the distribution of power and authority within a group. Tremendous variations are found in comparing different groups.

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF LAW is a new area of anthropology; it examines legal structures cross-culturally. It seeks to understand those who formulate laws, those who enforce the law and those who violate the law. As societies increasingly rely upon formalized methods of social control to replace other institutions, the scope of this discipline will enlarge in a corresponding fashion. The field contains material from oral as well as written traditions.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND EDUCATION is concerned with the application of anthropological concepts to education. This includes formal and informal institutions which are charged with preparing members for normative functioning in society.

The discipline has been responsible for the partial elimination of some culturally biased intelligence tests and the demand for inclusion of cross-cultural materials. Within the United States, anthropologists have argued for textbooks which reflect the cultural heritage of all ethnic groups in a non-biased manner. Anthropologists have the potential to help create an educational system which would allow true equality in terms of accessibility to knowledge. It remains to be seen if the discipline can overcome the institutionalized opposition which supports the status quo.

LINGUISTICS is the study of language; most anthropological linguists are primarily concerned with the analysis and recording of non-Western languages. Their materials are frequently utilized to train cultural and social anthropologists in the language of a subject group in preparation for fieldwork. Semantics, the study of the meaning of words, is another area of emphasis; the work of linguistic anthropologists frequently overlaps with that of linguistic specialists in the field of Humanities. Because language is much more than a collection of sounds, its importance cannot be ignored.

FOLKLORE examines the oral tradition of groups cross-culturally. As most primitive cultures were dependent upon oral tradition for information storage, myths, legends, dramas and rituals were developed to reinforce the retention of important information. Belief system specialists and ethnomusicologists frequently find a direct correlation

between the lyrics of chants, songs and ballads and the important traditions of a people. Drama, dance, ritual and art all come together in many cultures; folklore analysis is one specialized way of ascertaining the functional significance of their elements.

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY is the study of music from an anthropological perspective. It involves the recording and observation of all musical notations, rhythms and types of musical instruments. The range of the discipline is very broad in that it can involve any type of music, whether oral or instrumental, in any population group in the world. Dance is included as an integral category along with the verbal aspects of songs and chants.

ART AND ANTHROPOLOGY examines graphic, plastic and dance arts from a cross-cultural perspective. Subjects range from decoration on utilitarian tools to body adornment through scarification or tattoos; carvings and classical oils are also studied. Frequently, anthropologists working in this discipline are also involved in ethnomusicology, folklore, and belief-system research. The anthropological approach is to examine the arts from a functional as well as an aesthetic perspective.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND BELIEF SYSTEMS is the subdiscipline which delves into the mechanisms groups develop to answer questions about the unknown. Creation, the universe, and explanations of our place within it are all related to belief systems. The manner in which groups seek to explain

and control their world, including their relationship to supernatural forces, serves as the primary focus of this area of anthropology. Shamanism, magic, witchcraft, curing, and other complex ritual behaviors also are examined in this category.

CULTURE AND PERSONALITY, also called PSYCHOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY, examines the relationship between an individual's personal experiences and the molding forces exerted via his or her experiences as a member of a group. The various factors which affect the personality development of an individual and the relationships between individual and group personality characteristics are studied. At one time this field was dominated by Freudian psychology; presently it is highly influenced by the Behaviorist viewpoint. Culture and personality will probably continue to enjoy a high degree of popularity, primarily because of the increased need to examine psychological determinants cross-culturally. This avenue of study is particularly important, because of the information already available on the effects of rapid cultural change on individuals and groups. It might be possible to develop strategies to prevent some of the social problems associated with this phenomenon by closely examining this process in non-Western societies. The rapidity of cultural change in these groups is well documented; thus, theoretical material might be generated to minimize cultural shock for all groups.

APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY is the application of anthropological

concepts to specific social problems. The applied anthropologist utilizes theoretical material to bring about social change. Most applied anthropologists within our culture work with groups that are outside the mainstream of society. In non-Western societies, applied anthropologists work with indigenous populations to solve problems which the local group defines as problematical. These anthropologists use the training and conceptual background of their discipline to solve, reduce or alleviate a problem by giving assistance. Most attempt to train group members to deal with the problem so that they may continue the process after the anthropologist leaves. The field is closely related to social work and community organizing.

URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY is the study of the urban areas of the world; it focuses upon development and evolution from a cross-cultural perspective. It overlaps with most of the other sub-divisions of anthropology, providing a special insight into the phenomenon of social compacting. Sociology is closely related to this field, as are planning and urban studies. Conceptual materials from economic and political anthropology are commonly utilized in this discipline. Urban areas are seen as confrontation points between various social classes. Quite frequently extremes in social classes are involved. Comprehending the power relationships of these classes is fundamental to any analysis of urban structure.

RURAL ANTHROPOLOGY derives its perspective from the

agrarian nature of the groups it records. Historically, it is closely linked to rural sociology and is largely Western-oriented. The primary impetus for this discipline came during the Great Depression of the 1930's. Funding for recording the lifeways of rural populations was made available, and anthropologists and sociologists compiled data on these groups. Today, there is some interest in continuing this area and actively enlarging it to embrace a greater number of non-western groups in a more organized fashion.

ECOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY is concerned with the interaction between man and the habitat. At one time scholars atempted to define key or deterministic relationships between the type of habitat and the complexity of a group. The trend today is to see the inter-relationships between a group's struggle to survive and the level of information it brings to bear on this fundamental problem. The interaction between a group and its habitat generally produces changes in both. An ecological anthropologist tries to examine the symbiotic relationships of groups to each other and their environment. Since contemporary populations have accelerated their reliance on the mechanisms by which they survive, a number of extremely complex issues have arisen. These relate to the very survival of the human population. Pollution, food production, population growth, and the ultimate carrying capacity of the earth are commonly investigated in this branch of anthropology. Because of the nature of the subject matter, the field of ecological anthropology is bound to expand as more information about our adaptation and nature's responses becomes available.

Performance Activities

Please fill in the blanks:

1. Anthropology is the only discipline which encompasses the study of humankind from a B_____ and S_____ perspective.

2. Archaeology is the anthropological subdiscipline which uncovers the secrets of the P_____.

3. Archaeology can be divided into three major categories: E_____, Prehistoric and C_____.

4. Physical anthropology is the study of human and non-human primates from a B_____ perspective.

5. M_____ anthropology examines medical practices from a cross-cultural perspective.

6. Cultural anthropology is sometimes called E_____; it records the customs, habits and life-ways of population groups throughout the world.

7. E_____ is sometimes used as a synonym for social anthropology.

8. S_____ rely more heavily upon statistical and mathematical models.

9. M_____ anthropology defines relationships from a statistical and spatial perspective.

10. E_____ anthropology acknowledges and examines the role that economic institutions play in shaping a society.

11. American anthropologists were conservative; they tended to ignore M_____ theoretical explanations.

12. C_____ and Marxism owe part of their philosophical base to the perspective of some 19th Century social philosophers who viewed the world from an evolutionary perspective.

13. L_____ evolution was an attempt to place cultural groups upon a scale of complexity.

14. Marxist anthropologists view the world from a conflict perspective, which places an emphasis upon P_____.

15. A traditional anthropological vantage point stipulates that N_____ influences determine the distribution of labor and resources within a group.

16. Anthropology has never been V_____ F_____.

17. P_____ anthropology emphasizes the role of political systems within anthropology.

18. The E_____ of law is an area which seeks to examine legal structures cross-culturally.

19. Anthropology and E_____ is concerned with the application of anthropological concepts to education.

20. Linguistics is the study of L_____.

21. F_____ examines the oral and mythical traditions of groups from a cross-cultural perspective.

22. E_____ is the study of music from an anthropological perspective.

23. A_____ and anthropology examines graphic, plastic and dance arts.

24. Anthropology and B_____ S_____ is the subdiscipline which delves into the mechanisms groups develop to snaswer questions about the unknown.

25. Culture and personality, also termed P_____ anthropology examines the relationship between an individual's personal experiences and the molding forces exerted via his or her experiences as a member of a group.

26. A_____ anthropology applies anthropological concepts to specific social problems.

27. U_____ anthropology is the study of the urban areas of the world and focuses upon development and evolution.

28. R_____ anthropology derives its perspective from the agrarian nature of the groups it records.

29. E_____ anthropology is concerned with the interaction of man and his habitat.

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